

Rhode Island Refuges Restore Wildlife Habitat and Stem the Tide of Invasive Plants

The 2011 field season has been the most productive one ever for the habitat restoration crew of the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This year some 15 species of non-native invasive plants were treated on over 150 acres of refuge property.

The work was accomplished by a combined effort of USFWS staff, volunteers, seasonal interns, contractors, and partnership projects with The Nature Conservancy and the town of Middletown. Various control methods were utilized such as hand pulling and cutting, weed wrenching, mowing, and herbicide application. Invasive plants controlled included Garlic Mustard, Japanese Knotweed, Japanese Barberry, Asiatic Bittersweet, Beach Rose, Multiflora Rose, Morrow's Honeysuckle, Japanese Honeysuckle, Spotted Knapweed, Black Swallowwort, Autumn Olive, Porcelain Berry, Purple Loosestrife, Japanese Stiltgrass, and Crown Vetch. Some of the treatment areas are part of a continued long-term invasive plant control effort and others were treated for the first time in 2011. The refuge plans to conduct follow up treatments in all of these areas again in 2012.

One of the treatment areas includes a 20 acre section of Ninigret NWR that is part of a regional adaptive management project. Three other New England refuges are also involved in this project; the goal of which is to return land dominated by invasive plants back to a native maritime shrub land. At Ninigret we have treated non-native invasive plant species, removed select large trees that shade out native berry-producing shrubs and planted native shrubs in open areas. The refuge just purchased over 200 additional native shrubs for this project and will plant them this fall to enhance even more maritime shrub land habitat.

Maritime shrub land habitat is a limited resource in Rhode Island since many coastal areas have been taken over by development and invasive plant species. Additionally, the refuges protect other types of diminishing habitat critical for wildlife such as tidal saltmarshes and grasslands. The areas being restored on the Rhode Island refuges are expected to benefit a variety of native wildlife species including Piping Plovers, migratory songbirds, New England Cottontail, native pollinating insects, small mammals, and secretive marsh birds. Thanks to the dedicated interns, volunteers, and partners of the refuge; the wildlife that depend on these pockets of critical habitat can continue to call Rhode Island home.



1. Appalachian Mountain Club crew member removes an invasive Multiflora Rose shrub on Block Island NWR.



2. On Ninigret NWR contractors mowed and chemically treated an area of dense invasive shrubs, photo taken after mowing.